



State of New Jersey

DEPARTMENT OF EDUCATION
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Governor

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Commissioner

December 2, 2004

TO: Chief School Administrators and Charter School Lead Persons

FROM: Dwight Pfennig
Acting Commissioner

SUBJECT: **2004-2005 Best Practices/Star Schools Program**

It is my pleasure to announce the 2004-2005 competition for the Best Practices/Star Schools Program. The purpose of this program is to recognize and celebrate the excellence achieved by New Jersey's public schools.

The focus of the Best Practices/Star Schools competition is to once again identify programs that promote high student achievement. The Star Schools competition remains unchanged. However, this year we have limited the Best Practices competition categories to those twelve that have their own New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards. We made this decision in order to further align the program with the Core Curriculum Content Standards and with the department's accountability system, the New Jersey Quality Single Accountability Continuum (NJQSAC).

Since its inception in 1993, 546 Best Practices and 105 Star Schools have been recognized through the Best Practices/Star Schools Program. This program is an important part of the department's efforts to assist school districts, teachers, and parents in providing information about models of exemplary and well-organized practices. The New Jersey Professional Education Port (NJPEP) helps the educational community with the implementation of standards-based reform and the statewide assessment system through its virtual academy, featuring classroom projects and activities from the Best Practices and Star Schools, beginning with the 2000-01 awardees.

Star Schools represent New Jersey's "*cutting edge*" schools. They demonstrate the successful integration of strategies that result in improved student educational outcomes utilizing the Core Curriculum Content Standards. In addition, Star Schools are characterized by effective leadership and high levels of professional development and research, which contribute to administrative/fiscal efficiency, collaboration with stakeholders and exemplary teaching practices. The Star Schools application requires that previously recognized winners wait five years before resubmitting an application and demonstrate how they have expanded, replicated and/or disseminated their specialization.

Best Practices represent exemplary and effective educational practices in New Jersey public schools. These practices help identify models to support the department's policies and major initiatives by providing sustainable improved student outcomes. These effective practices, which sometimes are innovative, are characterized by clearly defined objectives related to identified student needs, documented assessment measures for meeting objectives, and the ability to be replicated by other schools. All Best Practices strategies must address the New Jersey Core Curriculum Content Standards in the area in which they apply. Please remember that a previously recognized Best Practice may not be resubmitted for recognition a second time and commercial programs from vendors are not eligible for consideration.

The 2004-2005 Guidelines and Applications for Star Schools and Best Practices are attached to this memo and are available on the department's website at <http://www.state.nj.us/education>. I encourage you to make this information available to principals and teachers in your district for their participation. You may download the applications either as a PDF file or as a MS Word file.

Please note that the **submission procedures** changed beginning with the 2003-2004 program year and going forward into the future. All applications must be submitted online via the department's internet website as of December 3, 2004, but no later than January 22, 2005. The department will **NOT** accept any hard copies of applications. The required signature pages must still be sent by mail to the County Offices of Education by January 22, 2005.

Schools not meeting AYP in the areas of language arts literacy and mathematics are not eligible to submit Best Practices applications in those program areas. These schools may, however, submit applications in any of the other program categories. Schools designated as a "School in Need of Improvement" are not eligible to submit Star Schools applications.

Evaluation of applications begins in March 2004 and site visits will be conducted in April and May. The annual recognition ceremony honoring the Star Schools and Best Practices recipients will be held on **June 2, 2005**.

Three regional technical assistance sessions are being offered to provide potential applicants with information about the Best Practices/Star Schools program and the application process. Potential applicants may register for the technical assistance sessions online at <http://education.state.nj.us/events/>.

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For additional information, please contact:

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Attachments

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